

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 09:30AM TUESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER**

## **“Our residents kept us going”: New research shows promising recovery for Kent tourism industry**



Copper Rivet Distillery, © Visit Kent

### **Press Release 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

Visit Kent's latest Economic Impact Model for 2021 published today shows promising signs of early recovery for Kent's tourism industry with the value of Kent's visitor economy increasing to £2.6 billion, a 60% increase from 2020, and 51.5 million combined day and overnight trips undertaken in the county in 2021, compared to 33.4 million in 2020.

The number of tourism jobs across the Garden of England also increased by 18% on 2020 data to 58,791 jobs, accounting for 8% of total employment in Kent last year, despite the Government furlough scheme ending in September 2021.

These latest figures provide the first look at the rebuild and recovery of Kent's tourism and hospitality sector during 2021. Using the industry-respected Cambridge Economic Impact Model, the study measured the volume and value of tourism within the county in 2021, and the effect of visits and visitor expenditure on the local economy throughout this tumultuous period. England entered its third national lockdown on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and began the 4 Step roadmap for lifting lockdown restrictions, which only formally ended in July 2021. The Government then also announced the 'Plan B' measures in December 2021 following the rise of the Omicron variant.

While the tourism and hospitality picture remained challenging throughout the region in 2021, these latest findings do show that the county's visitor economy performed above the national average across several areas. The overall results show that Kent benefitted from extremely high levels of domestic overnight tourism spending. When compared to the national growth of 64%, Kent's domestic overnight tourism spend increased by an incredible 97% on 2020, generating £477 million in 2021.

When looking specifically at trip purpose, the proportion of those travelling to visit friends and relatives (VFR) in the Garden of England during 2021 accounted for 36% of all domestic overnight trips, and 63% of all international overnight trips. This demonstrates the incredible influence that ongoing support from Kent's residents had on local businesses during a hugely difficult year. Our residents remain our greatest ambassadors – welcoming friends and family to experience our beautiful county first-hand.

**Visit Kent Chief Executive, Deirdre Wells OBE, said:** *“After our sector was devastated by the Covid-19 crisis throughout 2020, it is encouraging to see the results for 2021 which show vast improvement across all areas of the visitor economy, demonstrating the resilience and hard work of Kent's brilliant tourism, leisure, and hospitality sector during what was still a chaotic and uncertain time.*

*“The results show that whilst footfall was not yet back to 2019 levels, the vast increase in domestic visitors and more people staying overnight is extremely encouraging. We are delighted that our domestic overnight tourism spending was far above the projected UK national average, indicative of the strong tourism product in Kent that appealed to consumers. The findings around the importance of local spend, and the increase in VFR demonstrates that Kent residents continue to be the biggest advocates for our industry. We are extremely grateful to our residents who have shown unwavering levels of support for local businesses, during an extremely challenging time.”*

The findings show the success of Visit Kent's 2021 consumer campaigns, such as Welcome Back to Kent which encouraged overnight breaks in the county during late summer and autumn 2021. Similarly, campaigns like The Bigger Weekend were developed for Kent residents only, to offer a ballot for free tickets to some of Kent's biggest attractions during September 2021 to introduce our residents to new attractions and show gratitude for their ongoing support.

**Bill Ferris, CBE, Chairman at Visit Kent, commented:** *“These positive early recovery signs are evidence of Visit Kent's tireless work supporting the recovery of the visitor economy, on top of the appealing product and hard working tourism businesses in Kent. It is disappointing to see that while expenditure by inbound visitors was down -10% nationally, international spend in Kent was down -20% in 2021. All successful tourism businesses and destinations rely on positive perceptions and strong reputations. It is, therefore, not surprising to see that negative perceptions and poor press coverage around traffic issues and channel crossing issues continue to damage our image internationally. The findings from 2021's Economic Impact Study demonstrate exactly why Kent continues to need long-term support from central Government, to enable a full, sustainable destination recovery.”*

**Deirdre continued:** *“We have an exciting year ahead – we'll be running an international business events campaign in January, showcasing businesses' purpose-built event spaces as in-person meetings and 'away days' properly return, hosting 20 leading tour operators in Kent to further drive our recovery, and joining with coastal destinations across the UK to celebrate the Year of the Coast 2023. It is also clear there is a huge appetite for domestic stays in the county, so we'll working to bring more*

*hotel accommodation to support demand. Thanks to incredible collaborations county-wide, we're confident that we can continue to build a vibrant, sustainable, and resilient industry for the future, together."*

To access the full Kent Tourism Economic Impact Study 2021 report, along with a selection of district-specific reports, please visit:

<https://www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk/insights-and-resources/kent-cambridge-economic-impact-model/>

For more information about Kent, please visit [www.visitkent.co.uk](http://www.visitkent.co.uk).

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## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

For further media information on Visit Kent and images please contact Senior PR and Content Executive, Alex Valentine, at [press@visitkent.co.uk](mailto:press@visitkent.co.uk)

### **About Visit Kent**

Visit Kent Ltd is the Destination Management Organisation for Kent (the Garden of England).

It is recognised as one of the country's leading DMOs, targeting UK and overseas markets to raise Kent's profile as a premier destination, improving quality and skills within the industry, and growing investment in tourism. Visit Kent is a public/private sector partnership supported by Kent County Council, Medway Council, district and borough councils, and the leading sector tourism businesses in Kent.

For further information visit [www.visitkent.co.uk](http://www.visitkent.co.uk) (consumer) or [www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk](http://www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk) (business), or tweet @visitkent.

### **About the Cambridge Economic Impact Model**

The figures were derived using the Cambridge Economic Impact Model undertaken by Sergi Jarques at Destination Research on behalf of Visit Kent. The Cambridge Economic Impact Model is an industry respected tool for measuring the economic impact of tourism in a given area. It utilises information from national tourism surveys and regional/local data (e.g., accommodation stock, domestic and inbound trips) of the level of tourism activity within a given local area.

Please note that all figures in the research reports have been rounded, therefore there might be marginal discrepancies in subtotals and totals.

It is estimated that 2,368 actual jobs are supported by Bluewater, raising the total employment in that area to 6,019, or 10% of all employment in Dartford. Whilst it contributes to Kent's visitor economy, the shopping and retail nature of the destination must be taken into consideration.